DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 919 SO 033 305

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TITLE Three Monotheistic Religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Slide Exercise.
INSTITUTION California Univ., Berkeley. Office of Resources for International and Area Studies.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 40p.; Slides may not reproduce well. Part of the Teaching Comparative Religion through Art & Architecture Fall 2000 and Spring 2001 Institute, which was organized by ORIAS and Bay Area Global Education Program (Stanford University School of Education and World Affairs Council of Northern California).
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PUB TYPE Guides ~ Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Christianity; *Critical Viewing; Intermediate Grades; Islam; Judaism; Middle Eastern Studies; Religion Studies; *Religious Cultural Groups; Secondary Education; *Slides; Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS *Comparative Religion; *Monotheism

ABSTRACT

This slide exercise is intended to communicate information about the three major monotheistic religions of the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The exercise focuses on beliefs, events, symbols, institutions, and practices important to the three religions, but the main purpose is to impress upon students the many things that these three religions have in common, as well as their differences. To prepare for the slide show, the exercise sets up a procedure in which students are asked to identify on paper which religion each of the 20 slides belongs to (illustrations of the slides are included with the exercise). Identification of the slides with an explanatory paragraph is provided for the teacher. (BT)

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Three Monotheistic Religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam

by Dr. Laurence Michalak

Slide Exercise

Objectives:

This exercise is intended in part to communicate information about the three major monotheistic religions of the Middle East--Judaism, Christianity and Islam--about beliefs, events, symbols, institutions and practices important to the three religions. The main purpose, however, is to impress upon the students the many things that these three religions have in common, as well as their differences, which should lead to greater understanding and respect for other beliefs. Teachers may go straight to the slide show with identifications as a basis for discussion or they can follow the suggested activity below.

Procedure:

- Students number a page from one to twenty.
- The Slide Show: The teacher show twenty slides and asks the student to associate each slide with one or more of the three major religion of the Middle East--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, abbreviated J,C, and I for brevity. The teacher can show the first slide as an example, noting that the students should write I for "Islam", because the slide shows the Ka'aba at Mecca. For this first run through the slide show students will be looking for visual clues and guessing.
- Slide Identifications: Afterwards, the teacher goes over the slides again with the students, asking what associations they had with each slide and why, and providing the information that goes with the slides.

Many of the students will be familiar with their own religions but will not realize the things they share with other religions: for example, the Christian students may be surprised to find that the Last Supper was a Passover Seder. The teacher should emphasize these things that the three religions have in common and that it should not be surprising that they have a lot in common

since, after all, they arose in the same part of the world at different times, and each religion incorporates things that antedate it.

Identification with Explanation

1. **Answer: I**
The Ka'aba and the Haram in Mecca (Islam). The Ka'aba is the structure in whose southwest corner is located the Black Stone sacred to Islam.The Haram is the name applied to the mosque and enclosure where the Ka'aba is located.This is the place toward which Muslims face when they pray--the lodestone of Islam, and Mecca is the place of Islamic pilgrimage. Prayer and pilgrimage are two of the Five Pillars (or obligations) of Islam.

2. **Answer: J**
Bar Mitzvah, (Judaism) for boys and Bat Mitzvah for girls is the ceremony at age 13 which marks the attaining of religious majority. The boy reads from the Torah (the first five books of Moses of the Old Testament) in Hebrew as his father and grandfather stand proudly by. The cap, or yarmeluke, is worn in reverence to the Lord, and the prayer shawl or tallit, signifies a wish to commune with the Lord.

3. **Answer: C, (I,J)**
An Icon (Christian) is, for Orthodox or Eastern Christians, a kind of window to heaven, rich in religious symbols. Icons are not worshipped, but are venerated, and are a teaching tool. Seated figures, such as this, are typical. This is a wood icon covered in silver with writing in the Cyrillic alphabet, from Russia. Although such representations are contrary to Judaism and Islam, these could be considered correct answers too, since Jesus was Jewish, and Muslims venerate Jesus as a prophet.

4. **Answer: I**
The name of the Prophet, Mohamed, in Kufic style Arabic script (Islam). The prohibition against pictorial representation in Islam, although unevenly followed in different places and at different times, led to an emphasis on calligraphy, or beautiful writing, as an art form. These are the four Arabic letters, M, H, M, and D, for Mohamed, written from right to left (the short vowels are written as marks over and under the consonants). Mohamed was God's messanger, but was only a man; he performed no miracles and died a natural death, Muslims believe.

5. **Answer: C, (I,J)**
God hovers above Creation in this 15th Century Italian painting by Giovanni di Paolo (Christian). Again, although pictorial representation is contrary to Jewish and Islamic tradition, these would be correct answers too, since a similar version of the creation story is common to all three religions. The idea of creation, making something out of nothing, is unique to MIddle Eastern religious thought.

6. **Answer: J, C, I**
Jerusalem, the city whose skyline we see in this 1965 photograph, is holy to Judaism (the last judgement will take place here), Christianity (Christ lived part of his life and was crucified, buried, and arose from the dead here), and Islam (the Prophet Mohamed ascended into heaven here). This view is eastward toward the Dome of the Rock (the mosque with the gold dome in the middle ground), with the Mount of Olives in the background. The tall tower on the horizon is the Church of the Ascension and the smaller tower is the site where Jesus is said to have first taught the Lord's prayer.

7. **Answer: I, C,J**
This Eastern Islamic manuscript shows Adam and Eve (Islam), who occur in Genesis of the Torah (Judaism), or the first five books of the Old Testament (Christianity). Muslims venerate Adam as a Prophet. The old prohibition against pictorial representation was less observed outside mosques, outside Arabia, and after the Prophet's death. Turks, Persians and Eastern Muslims especially maintained pictorial representation. In fact, most Muslims are Eastern; Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have the largest Muslim populations.

8. **Answer: J**
This Ark, made around 1900, is from Cochin, India. An ark holds the Torah scrolls; it is placed on the Eastern wall of a synagogue and opens up. The writing in Hebrew at the bottom means "Crown of the Torah." The Ark recalls the Ark of the Covenant, which carried the Laws of Moses, and which the Jews carried into battle in Old Testament days (Judaism), referred to in the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

9. **Answer: I,J,C**
The interior of the Great Mosque of Kairouan in Tunisia, in Central North Africa, the first and the most holy mosque founded after the death of the Prophet Mohamed, when within a century Islam spread from Arabia to the Atlantic and up through Spain and into central France. Muslims remove their shoes before entering to pray on the woven mats. Note the different pillars and capitals taken from Roman, Phoenician, Byzantine, and other ruins, and the mihrab, or prayer niche facing East, at left.

10. **Answer: I, J:**
A circumcision--in this case, Islamic, in an Arab refugee settlement near Bethany, Jordan. Circumcision is also practiced in Judaism, when the baby is eight days old. In this case, the baby is 7-months-old, though some Muslims circumcise usually from about 7-years-old to almost puberty. In this picture, the local doctor in the red tarboosh applies the bandage, the parents stand on either side, and the village chief is the man with his back to the camera. Circumcision among Christians is common in some places, such as the United States, but in such settings Christians usually circumcise as a hygenic rather than a religious practice. The practice is Semitic an Middle Eastern in origin.

11. **Answer: I,C,J**
An Eastern Islamic representation of the sacrifice of Abraham, with the angel substitution a sheep for Abraham's son. In the Bible and the Torah, Abraham was prepared to obey God's will and sacrifice his son Isaac, born of his wife Sarah, so the story is also Jewish and Christian. Many Muslims believe that Abraham was about to sacrifice his other son, Ishmael, born of his servant Hagar. Both Jews and Arabs claim descent from Abraham--Jews through Isaac and Arabs through Ishmael.

12. **Answer: I**
A festival of an Islamic holy man, or wali, in rural Tunisia, North Africa. Popular Islam varies from scholarly Islamic practice, just as there are popular forms of Christianity and Judaism too. Note the tombs around the shrine of the saint. People who venerate the holy man or claim descent from him come to the festival and share food and sometimes sing and dance. Some people claim that it is an unorthodox practice and others claim that it is not religious at all, but a kind of family thing.

13. **Answer: J**
A Torah scroll inside an Ark at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem (Jewish): note the skull caps, or yarmelukes, on some of the boys. The Wailing Wall is all that remains of the Temple of Solomon, sacred to the Jews, destroyed by the Romans.

14. **Answer: I, J, C**
A piece of silver jewelry from Tunisia, North Africa, worn by Muslim women to hold their dresses up. This kind of pin is called a fibula, and it dates back at least to the Romans, who used them to hold their togas up. The jewelers in North Africa were mainly Jewish Note the symbols of all three religions--crescent (Muslim), six pointed stars(Jewish), fish (Christian), and bird. Many of these symbols date from prehistoric times and were absorbed into different religions.

15. **Answer: C,J,I**
The Garden Tomb, outside the present walls of Jerusalem, which is one of the sites which some Christians think might have been the tomb where Christ was buried and from which he arose from the dead on Easter. Note the groove in front of the tomb where a heavy circular stone blocked the entrance, as in the Bible. This was a typical Jewish tomb of the time. Jesus is a prophet to Muslims, who however do not accept the divinity or death or resurrection of Jesus, believing instead that He was ascended into heaven.

16. **Answer: J**
This is a scene in an Israeli synagogue for Sephardic (non-European) Jews, who have come to Israel from many lands. In this picture, from left to right, are Jews from Russia, Yemen, Morocco, Afghanistan, and Israel. Note the many symbols of Judaism -- six pointed star, seven-branched candlestick, Hebrew writing, and prayer shawl.

17. **Answer: C,I**
This mid-19th century engraving shows the interior of Santa Sophia, which was once the holiest church in Christianity, located in Byzantium (or Constantinople, now Istanbul, in modern Turkey); we see it after it was made into mosque, after the Islamic conquest by the Ottomans, with the large round Islamic monographs added up at the corners of the dome. Today it is a museum.

18. **Answer: C (J,I)**
A painting of the Last Supper, the evening before Christ was crucified -- this one an Italian painting by Tintoretto from Venice, done around 1593. Jesus offers bread and wine to his disciples; Judas sits alone opposite from Him; unseen angels swirl down; and the servants go about their duties. This is the origin of the Christian sacrament of the Holy Communion. But Christ was Jewish, and the last Last Supper was a Jewish holiday, the Passover Seder meal. Islam would be an acceptable answer too, since Christ was a Prophet to Muslims, although the painting is Christian.

19. **Answer: J**
Passover Seder meal (Jewish). This festival originally celebrated the barley harvest in early spring, but came to be associated with a historical event -- Pesach (Passover), the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. This is the most significant of the commemorative holidays, recalling the story of Moses and Pharaoh. The Hebrew word Pesach is related to paschal, meaning Easter. The festival begins with a meal called seder. During the festival, no leaven may be used in the bread, because there was no time in the flight from Egypt to let the bread rise. During the meal, the youngest child asks four set questions, beginning with, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" and the answers tell the story.

20. **Answer: C**
A Maronite (Christian) First Communion in Batroun, in central coastal Lebanon. Maronites are a united Christian group, from "united," meaning that they accept the supremacy of the Pope although they follow their own rite. Their Saint Maroun was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church earlier in this century. Maronites are the largest Christian group in Lebanon, where Christian Arabs make up about half the population.

There are also important Christian Arab populations in Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East and abroad. Notice that this is the only purely Christian slide out of the group, since the three religions share so much in common.

Slide 1

Slide 2

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Slide 3

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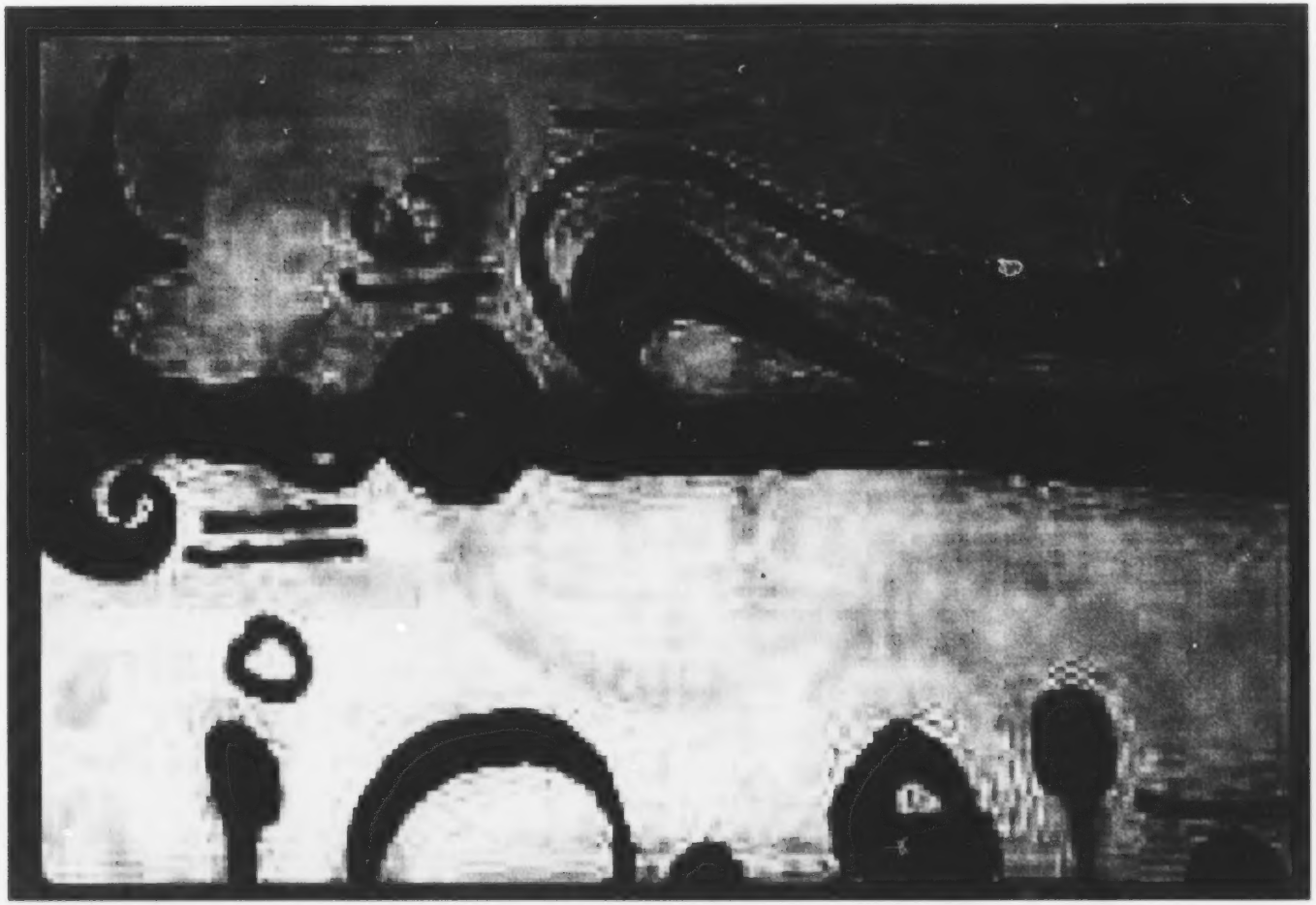
Slide 4



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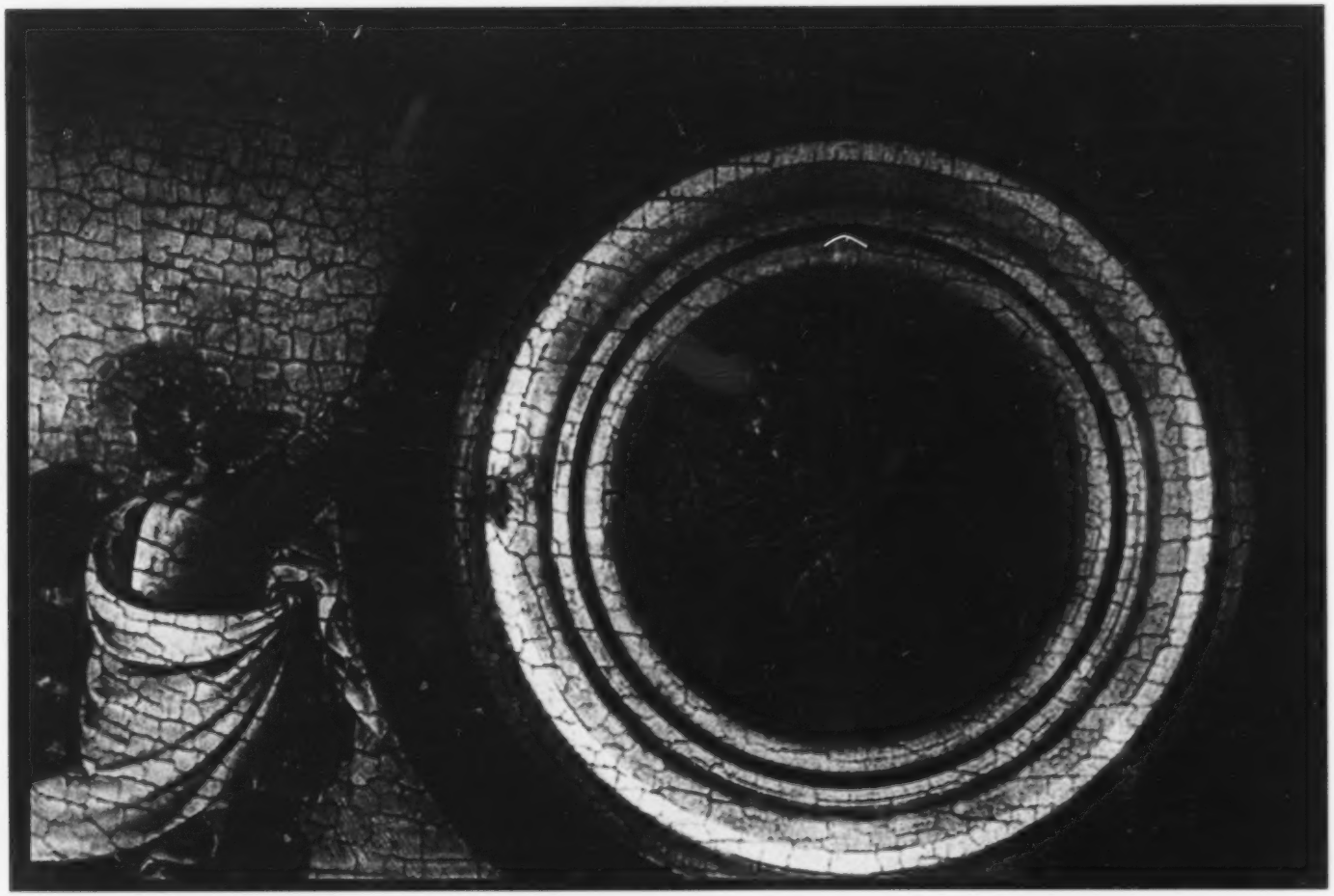

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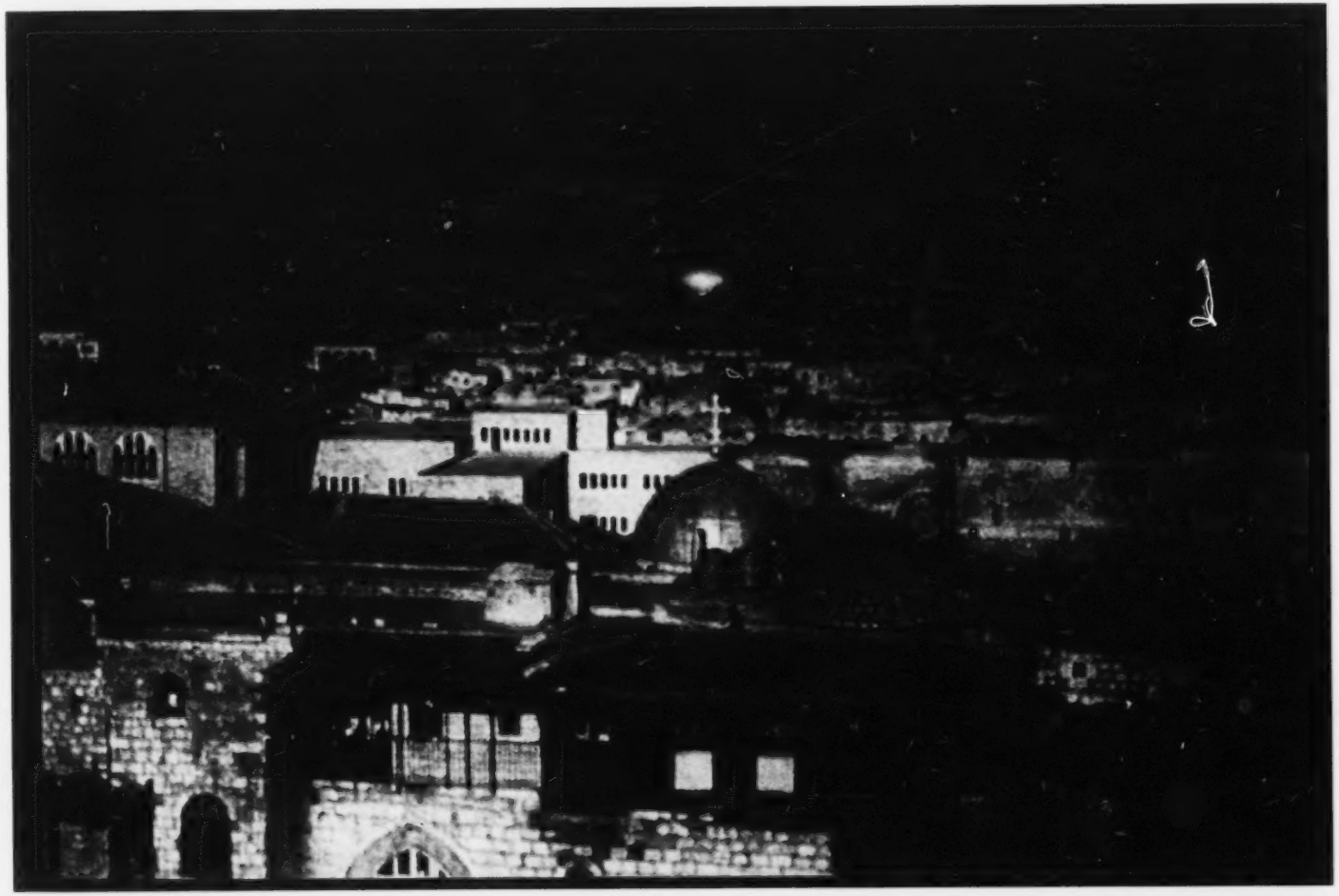

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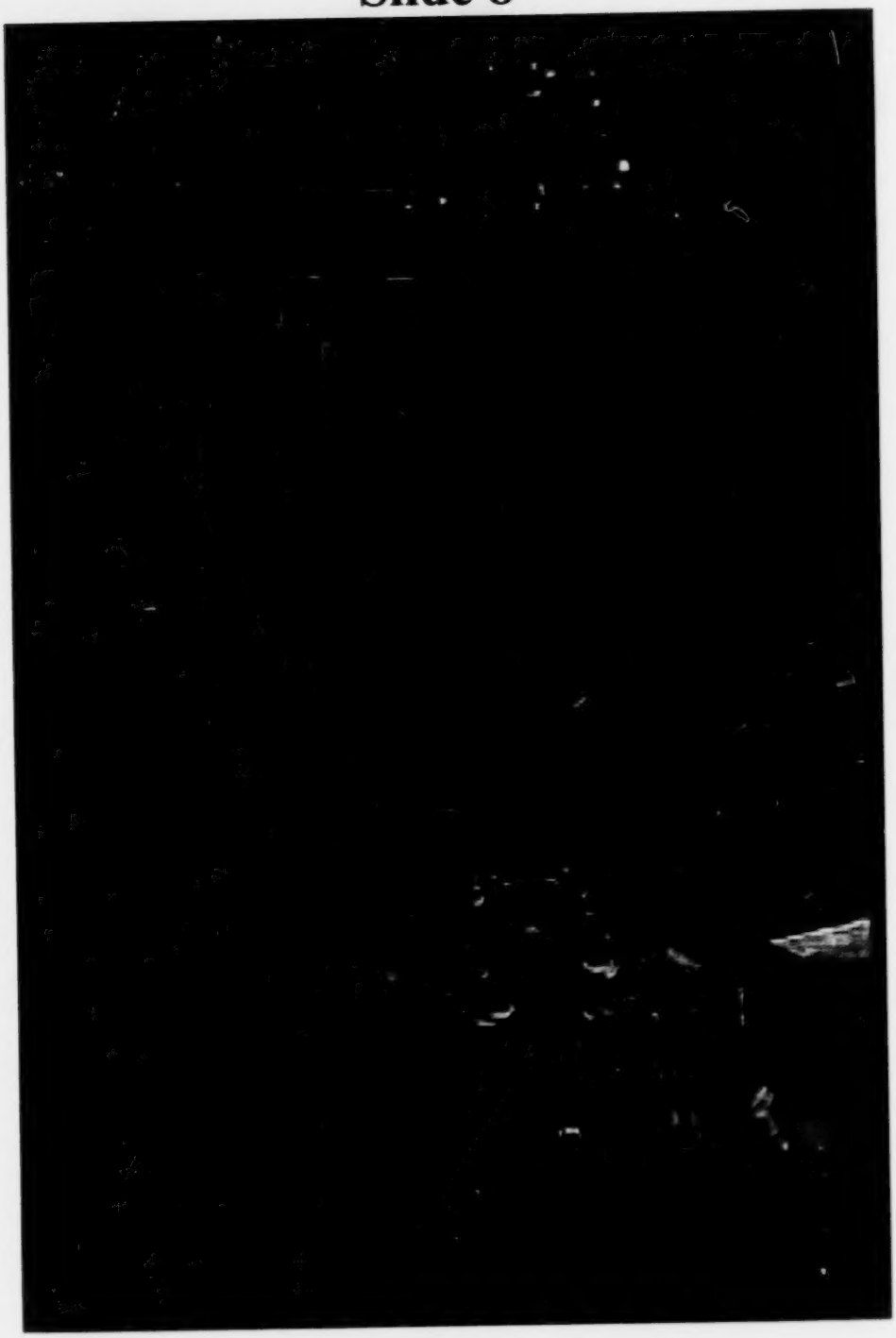

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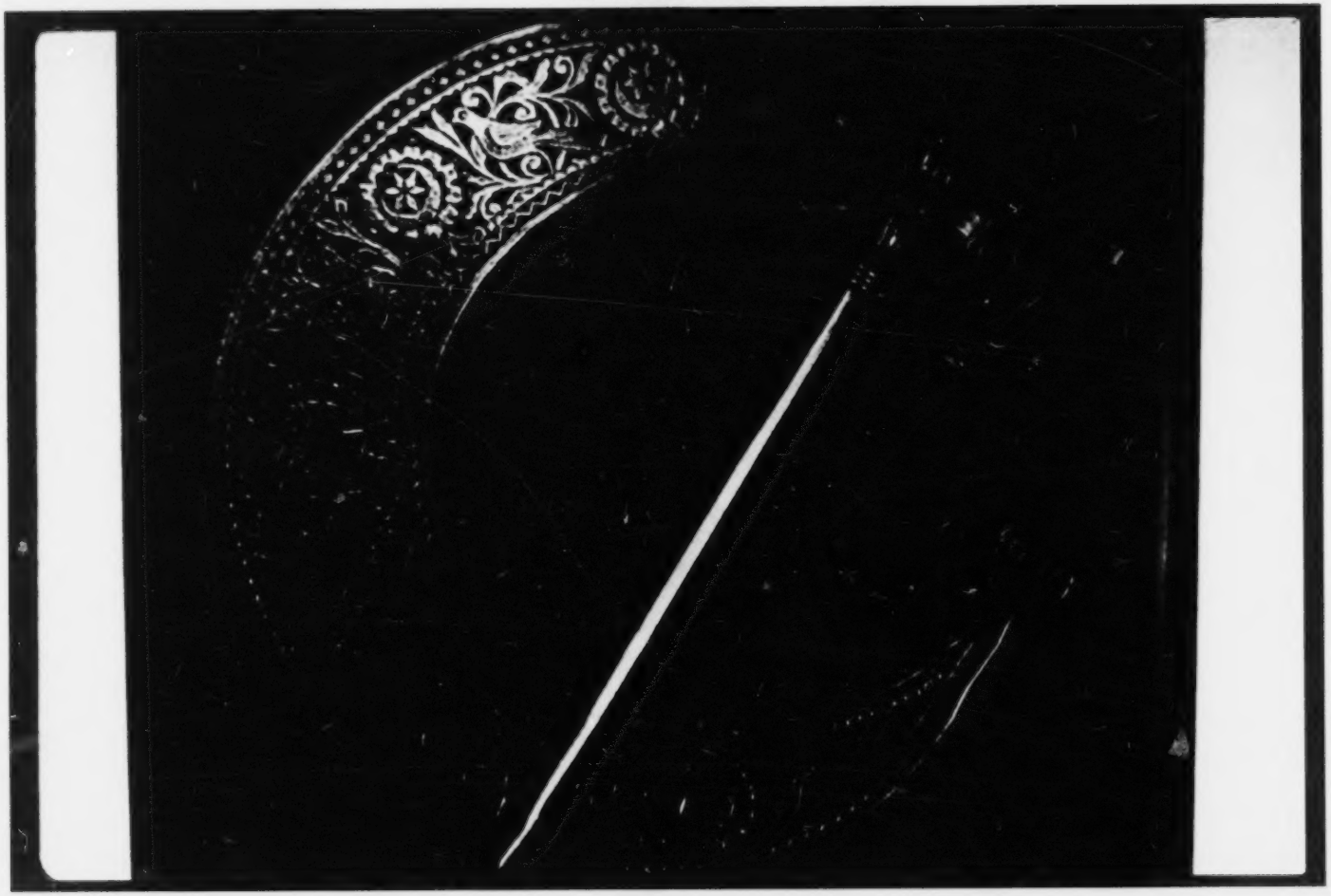

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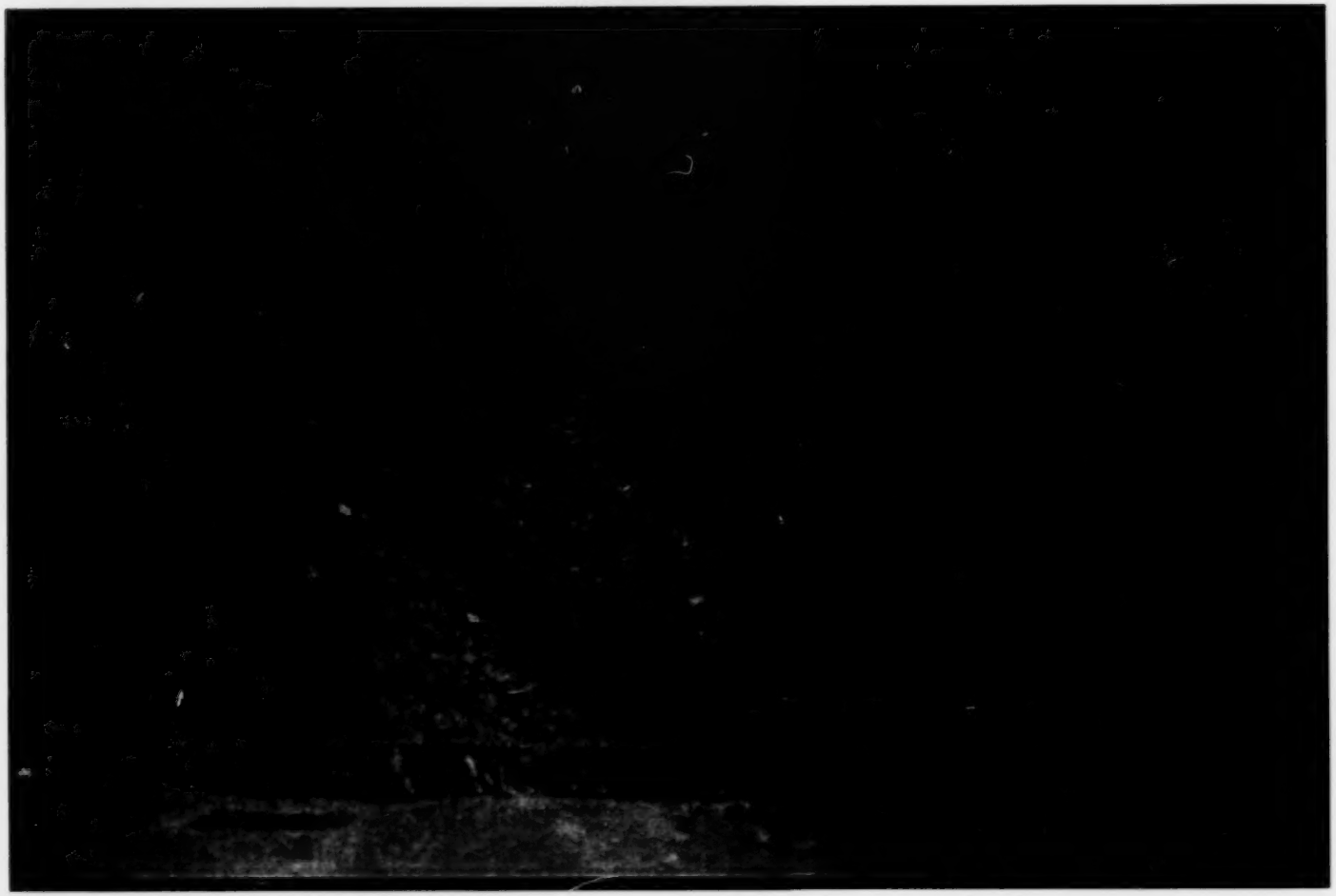

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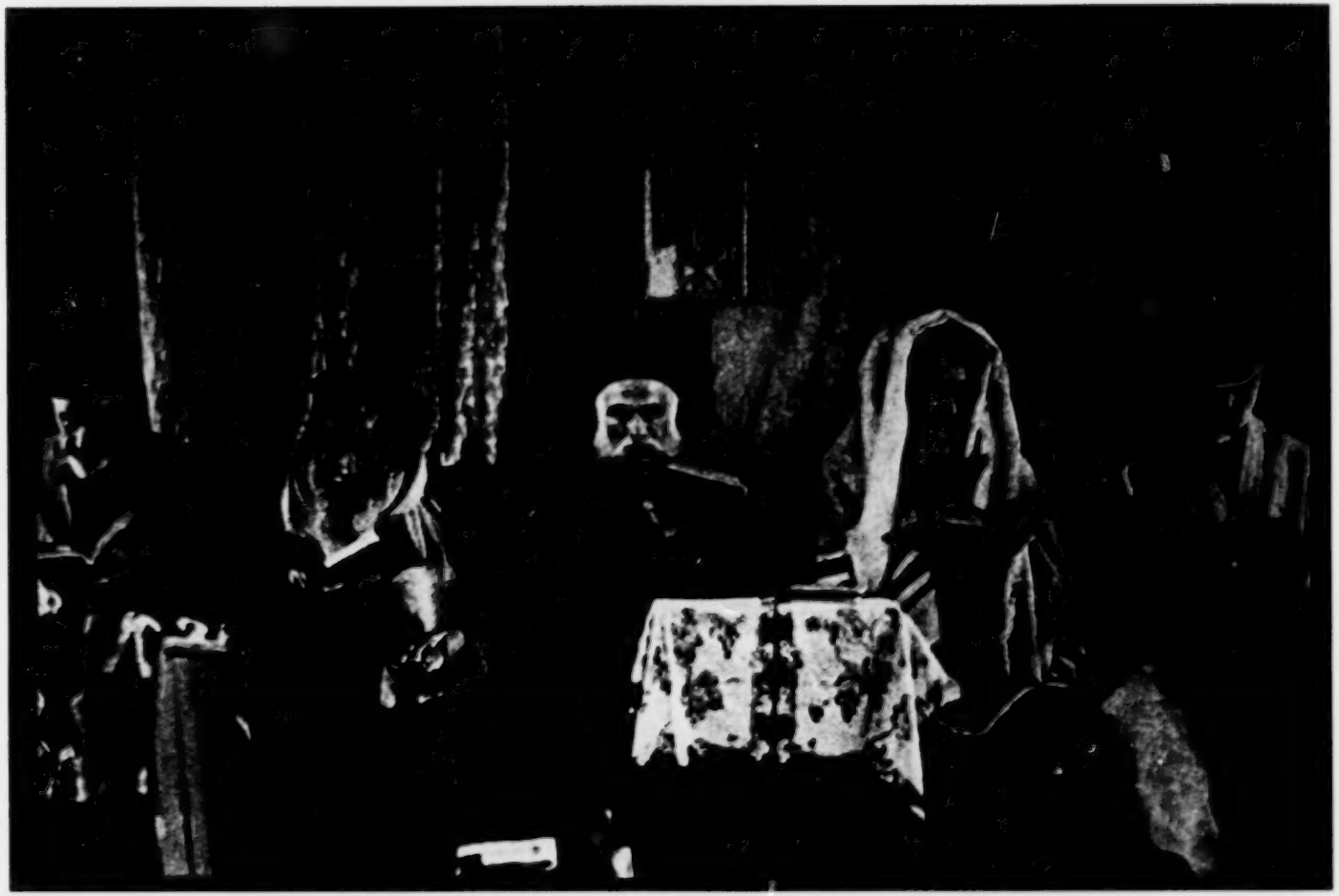

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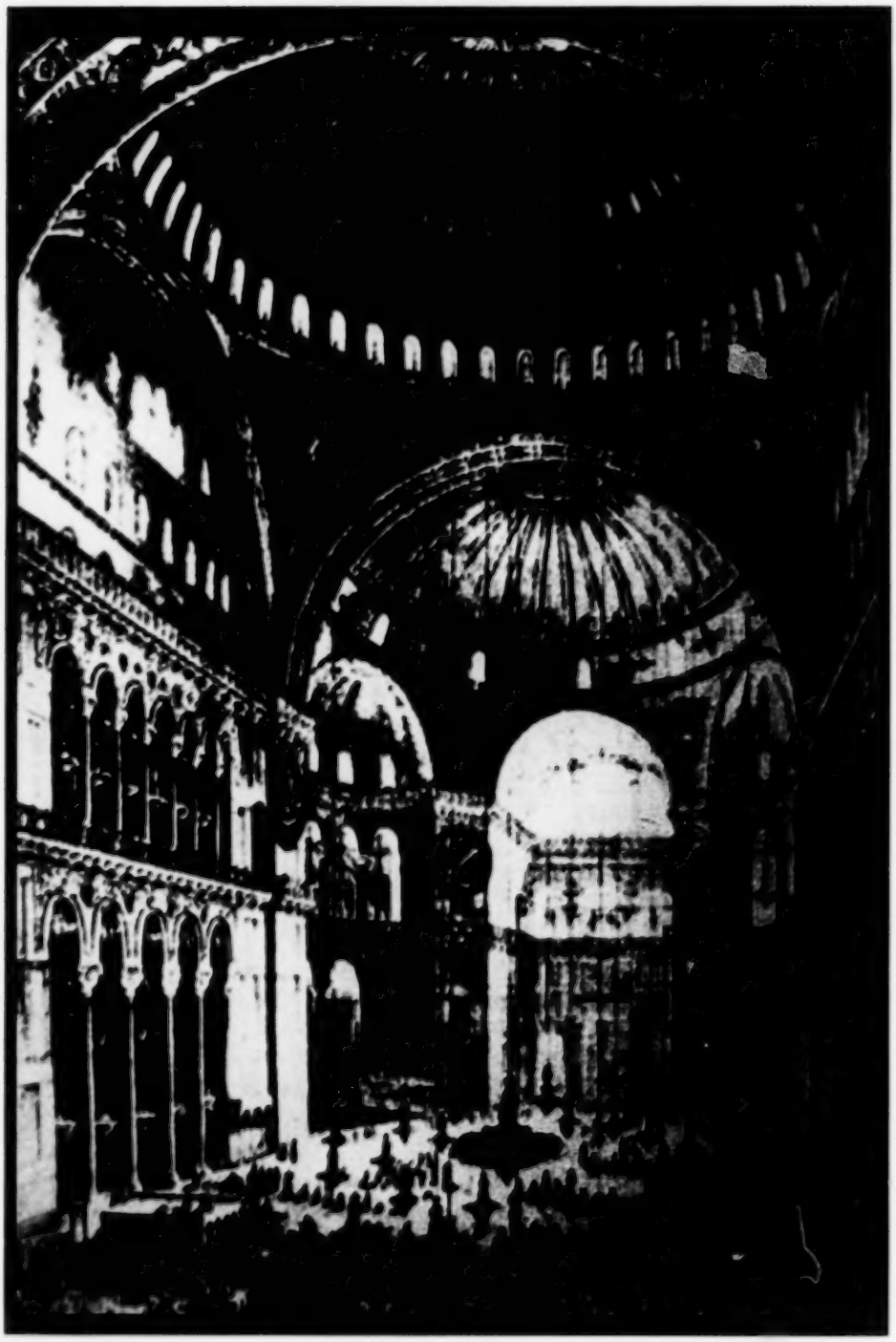

Slide 18

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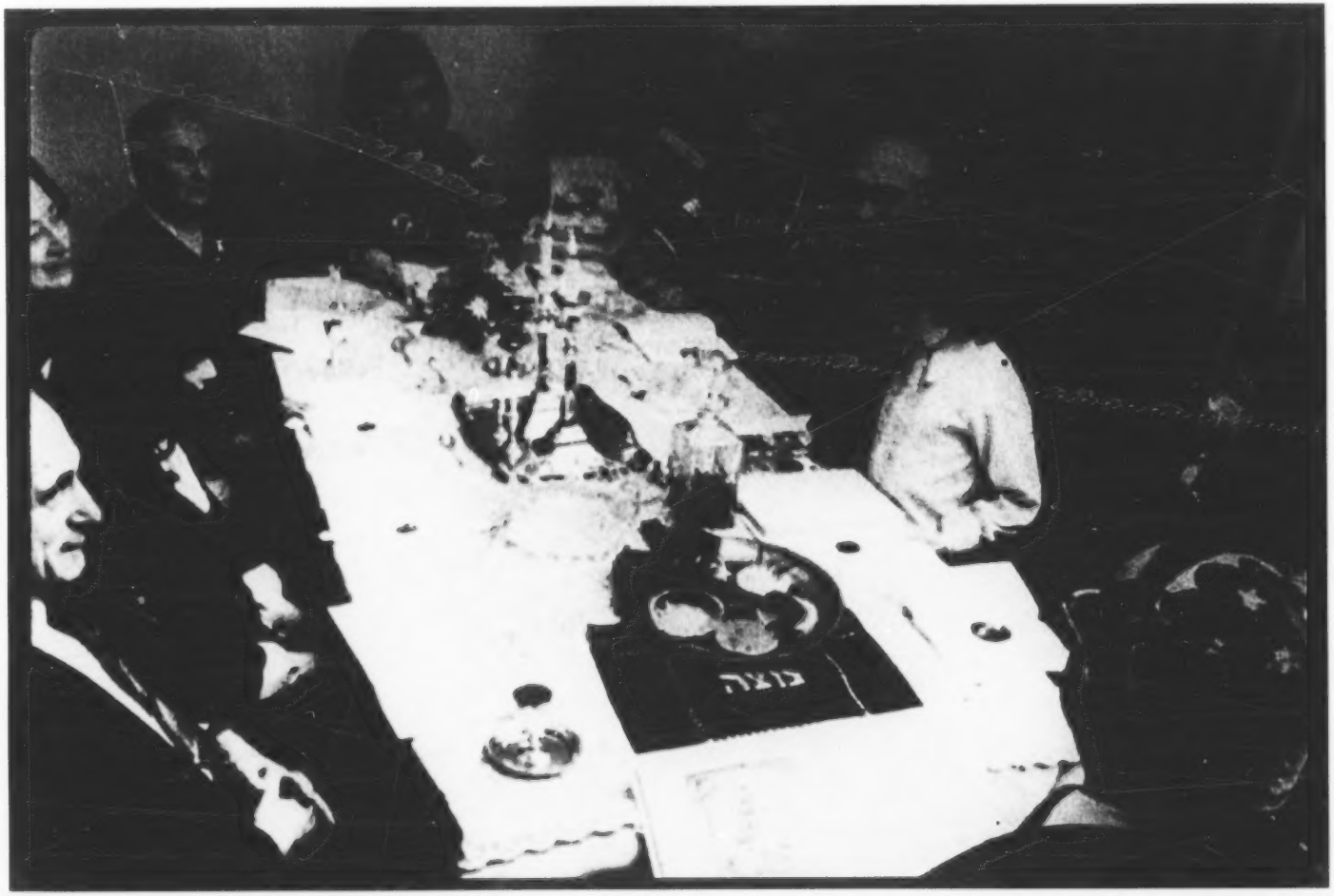

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